

LAW, VISUAL CULTURE, AND THE SHOW TRIAL

(Musine Kokalari's sad story)

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Discourses of Law

LAW, VISUAL CULTURE, AND THE SHOW TRIAL

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(Musine Kokalari in a book that makes us blush for yesterday and be ashamed for today)

In the middle of 2023, Dr. Agata Fijalkowski, Professor of Law at Leeds Beckett University, in England, published the book: “Law, visual culture and the Trial Show”. This book by Dr. Fijalkowski looks like it was written to show the similarity between the sentence that was given by the communist courts to the First Chairperson of the Social Democratic Party of Albania, Musine Kokalari, in 1946 and the persecution that the similar ones are doing today, after 78 years, against the founder of the Democratic Party of Albania, and the architect of political pluralism in Albania, Dr. Sali Berisha.

“This book represents a profound philosophical exploration of the intricate relationship between the promotion of injustice as justice and its connection to the concept of image. It spans 186 pages, with one-third specifically dedicated to the analysis of Musina Kokalari.”

“The book delves into the visual impact and ostentatious presentations within the ‘People’s Courts’ operating under the tight control of Communist Party-led governments. It specifically examines three prototypical post-World War II communist countries:”

1.- ALBANIA. – The initial example is drawn from Albania and revolves around the well-documented case of Musina Kokalari, the first initiator of establishing an opposition party in Albania.

The author says about Musine:

“She was a distinguished martyr of freedom. She is the first to have formulated in a lapidary manner the idea of pluralism in Albania. She defended herself at the trial where among other things, she said:

IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO BE A COMMUNIST TO LOVE ALBANIA”

“2. POLAND – The author’s second illustrative example is drawn from trials in Poland. She asserts that the practice of appointing courts in Soviet Poland was:”

“The authorities appointed judicial candidates who had no satisfied the basic requirements stipulated by the law up to that point , and by creating special schools under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice to train new judges on aspects of the people’s justice...both narratives were reinforced by Soviet legal propaganda”, say the author.

3.- EAST GERMANY – The third example is taken from East Germany. What is essential in the case of East Germany is the statement of Walter Ulbricht, the East German communist leader, who literally says :

“(Justice) has to look democratic, but we must have everything firmly in our hands”

“Dr. Fijalkowski’s continuous research interest involves the interdisciplinary analysis of post-World War II justice in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. This approach is grounded in rigorous scholarly archival work.”

“In her book titled *Law, Visual Culture, And the Show Trial*”, she explores the role of images and photographs as integral components of legal repression enforced by political courts in dictatorial, communist, and Soviet systems.”

“In addition to scholarly works, the author has penned scripts for several short films and contributed to a dramatic television series. Her screenplays draw inspiration from individuals and subjects explored in her legal academic endeavors.”

“In 2017, she created an aesthetically crafted short film titled “An unsung Hero” dedicated to Musina Kokalari (1917-1983). This film was part of an exhibition honoring the Albanian writer and political dissident, showcased at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford.”

“The author illustrates how individuals within the legal system, in dictatorial regimes, become instruments of politics, succumbing to the influence of authorities in order to advance their political agenda through legal means.”

If you want to follow this article in Albanian language, please visit:

Note: The images are sourced from Dr. Fijalkowski’s book



78 Law, Visual Culture, and the Show Trial in Albania

what she wanted to be: well-dressed, beautiful, and with a book in her hands'.⁹⁷ One needs to keep in mind the time and place we are referring to: Rrëshen at that time. When she fell ill with cancer, she was refused a hospital bed and she died in August 1983. In 1993 the then Albanian president Sali Berisha declared Kokalari, together with several other Albanians, a 'Martyr for Democracy'. In Saimir Kumbaro's 2012 documentary *The Martyrs*, the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare remarks that:

(W) { [She] was a distinguished martyr of freedom. She is the first to have formulated in a lapidary manner the idea of pluralism in Albania. She defended herself at the trial, where among other things she said: 'It is not necessary to be a communist to love Albania'.⁹⁸



TIRANË KORRIK 1946
1551 GJYQI I SAMI QERIBASHIT ME SHOKË. MUZII
KOKOLARI PËNPARA TRUPIT GJYKUES.



Figure 3.8 Musine Kokalari in local costume, date unknown
Credit: musinekokalari.org.

Kokalari's literary achievements earned her an invitation to join the prestigious Albanian League of Writers and Artists. Her publications were unique because of the use of the local vernacular and reference to the prevailing